DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 336 606 CE 058 999

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TITLE University for Masses.
PUB DATE Aug 91
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the National Workshop on Bangladesh Open University (Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 3-4, 1991).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Access to Education; *Adult Education; *Developing Nations; Distance Education; Educational Strategies; Financial Problems; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Labor Force Development; *Mass Instruction; *Open Universities; Population Growth; Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS *Bangladesh

ABSTRACT

Education, a basic need, is the foundation of developing countries such as Bangladesh. Ignorance and illiteracy are obstacles to growth and technological progress. Formal schooling must be supplemented with nonformal education, distance education, and out-of-school education for workers who want to continue their studies. Universities must develop mass education programs and alternative systems to eliminate discrimination against rural and disadvantaged groups. The relationship between universities and the adult world should address the underuse of human resources. One alternative, the open university, delivers mass education through a multimedia approach and structured courses for home-based students. Three factors affect educational development: (1) financial constraints; (2) continued rapid population growth; and (3) structural changes in the economy. Through the use of new communication techniques, access to educational programs can be extended to large rural audiences through satellite communication and fiber optic cable. By using both conventional and alternative educational systems, there will be a pooling of knowledge and ideas. (NLA)

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UNIVERSITY FOR MASSES

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Paper Circulated
at the
National Workshop on Bangladesh Open University
3-4 August 1991
Dhaka

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UNIVERSITY FOR MASSES

Motilal Sharma

1. We are only 10 years away from the 21st century. Yet it is most painful to realize that the age-old problems of poverty, ignorance, malnutrition and disease continue to plague millions of disadvantaged people in the rural communities of the developing countries. These problems persist even as, within the past three decades, mankind has made tremendous advances in science, technology and mass media. Food, clothing, shelter, medicare and education are considered as basic needs. In some cases, education is even more pervasive than the other basic needs. It is the foundation, the bedrock, the root cause of man's state of development or underdevelopment. It is ignorance, more than any other single factor that breeds poverty. Poverty is both a result and a further cause of ignorance. For developing nations such as Bangladesh, education can equalize opportunities, especially for the deprived and disadvantaged, and therefore must be delivered with efficiency and quality. The latter involves costs and resources of a magnitude that are not within the means of the country. Yet its people must be nurtured with the proper values, the required knowledge and appropriate skills so that the minimum standards of life, a sense of dignity, and the sustainability of everyday survival can be attained. **EDUCATION IS THE NUTRIENT THAT SERVES AS A CATALYST FOR ALL THE NECESSARY INPUTS TOWARD THE TOTAL DEVELOPMENT OF MAN.**

2. Without vision, the prophets say, a nation perishes. So it is with community. As we span the next 10 years towards the 21st century, decisions about the future must be made now. But these decisions must not begin with the approach of designing and specifying physical targets or

material wealth. The problems are so massive and the time is so short that we must have a panoramic vision that must start with the prioritization of the values that ensure the fullest development of mankind. And the value that will ultimately count the most is one which can categorically say that the primary beneficiaries of development decisions ought to be the underprivileged of the developing societies: the poorest and the most destitute and deprived, namely the rural poor, particularly the children and women. Such an emphasis has become essential in the light of today's pervasive culture of poverty.

3. Today, ignorance, illiteracy, or the lack of education are regarded as among the biggest obstacles to sustained growth and technological progress. Conventional means of spreading education are proving to be inadequate in the face of rapidly increasing populations. Furthermore, the quality of schooling remains low, particularly in remote, rural areas. There is a marked need to supplement formal schooling with non-formal education, distance education and out-of-school education for people who have either missed schooling or have simply dropped out, or want to continue their studies while on the job.

4. Educational systems including universities are the creation of society. They have to function in society and for society. They draw their sustenance from society. Therefore, they have a duty not only for the future, but also for the contemporary society. Hence, the universities must accept full responsibility for, among others, mass education programs. The close liaison between the universities and voluntary agencies devoted to mass education and the active assistance

rendered by the former to the latter is considered important. The universities must develop comprehensive programs for education for masses in a determined effort to eradicate adult illiteracy first and then to promote education of an all-round nature among all citizens. Formal education systems including conventional universities have grown shells around themselves and no longer seem to be sensitive to the educational requirements of the communities. This, of course, is also a result of the neglect of, and discrimination against our rural people (masses) and the disadvantaged groups, including women.

5. The universities are expected to play an important role by undertaking some community problem-solving activities. I am, however, sorry to say that in many of the Asian countries, particularly those which have had colonial rule, the universities became highly detached from the community. Such self-inducted isolation and delineation, based on a false sense of intellectual superiority is totally unwarranted and illogical as the universities have, traditionally had hardly anything to do with the ordinary people. In India and in several Asian countries, we have not been able to get out of this colonial perspective. I am not oblivious of the fact that there are some glorious exceptions to this rule in some of the developing countries. However, our universities, by and large, have yet to develop their interest in identifying the problems of the community around them and involving the faculty and citizens in a continuing search for tackling the same.

6. Therefore, there is a need for development of alternative systems to address these demands. The mass education, as proposed here, means essentially teaching people who already have considerable knowledge, and experience, concerns and responsibilities. Knowledge, wisdom and education, though closely inter-related and inter-linked are different entities, more so in this age of information-explosion. The universities, by providing education for masses and through its involvement in development activities, can learn a lot and acquire invaluable experiences. I feel that the relation of universities and the adult world today should be an inseparable part of the whole university program. Open university through distance education can provide one of the alternatives to achieve strong relationship between the university and the adult world. Through establishment of such a relationship, serious efforts for education for masses could be made to address the problems of poverty, low productivity, malnutrition, sickness and illiteracy as well as under-utilization of resources, especially human resources which are in abundance in Bangladesh.

7. The conventional universities and schooling system could be characterized as a limited and finite model of education and, therefore, are inadequate systems to address the issues and problems related to education for masses. Open university is a unique organization for delivering education for masses through multi-media approach and structured courses which could be made available to home-based students. The introduction of open university as an institution through which adults who, for one reason or the other, had not previously entered the formal education, although fully capable of it, has come at a time, when the

purpose and availability of educational opportunities have been widely re-examined.

8. Moreover, the educational systems of the countries of Asia share many common problems including rising costs in the face of budgetary constraints, lack of curriculum renewal, lack of textbooks, lack of trained teachers, inadequate level of compatibility between education systems and the world of work; gaps between the supply and demand of teaching aids leading to low quality and low systemic efficiency of education, and very limited access to good education for many groups especially the rural poor and disadvantaged, including women. About 60 per cent of the population of Asian developing countries live in rural areas. DMCs are finding it difficult to fulfill the goal of universalization of primary education, and are also not able to meet the increasing social demand for education at all levels for all target groups through the formal structure of education. The illiteracy rate in the region continues to be high and education for all could well remain a distant dream for the region as a whole. Judging by the present trends, the important features of the socio-economic environment of education development, both quantitative and qualitative, in the 1990s, are likely to include the following: (a) severe financial constraints; (b) continued rapid population growth; and (c) structural changes of the economy, including profound changes of the ways in which the economy functions. The education that developing nations desperately need, and constantly seek, is one which equalizes opportunities for the poor and disadvantaged children and women in particular; and therefore, one that must be delivered with efficiency and quality. Technology can help distribute

education from all of the world's best sources to all the people, irrespective of age, sex, creed, religion, socio-economic status, who are in urgent need of education wherever, thus crossing all geographical constraints. Through distance education strategy, specially tailored programs for each target group can be prepared and delivered. Such a strategy would bring to their very huts, no matter how deprived, an array of resources that can adequately empower the poor of the Third World and bring new wealth and opportunities to improve their quality of life.

9. Through the use of new communication technologies, access to good educational programs can greatly be extended to large audiences in rural and remote areas with tremendous flexibility of subject matter content, in locations served, and with a choice of narrow or wide band formats. Two new technologies, namely satellite communication and fibre optic cable, have dramatically enhanced educational capabilities, but others such as the VHF terrestrial radio telephone, cellular radio technology and various new mobile communication techniques are making important contributions. Satellite and fibre optic transmission technologies are, in fact, complementary. Satellites are still the best for broadcasting to provide for rural and remote access, while fibre optics are well suited to linking centers of learning, university campuses, etc. Fibre optic-based educational network can also be "piggybacked" onto public telecommunications networks at a modest cost. Today, the future for educational transmission costs is very promising. Fibre optic cables can now be made for about @ $1.00 a foot, while micro-terminals, complete with microprocessors and printers, can be purchased for about @ $2,000. The fibre-optic line provides sound and picture quality that antenna-bound TV

viewers can only dream of. Within the next 10 years satellite transponders could probably be purchased for as little as $250,000. In short, the reduced costs of technology could make a large number of educational services available, through the distance education mode, to more and more people. Where appropriate, we must examine, evaluate and utilize the many new transmission and programming capabilities that are now available from advanced communication technologies, especially satellites. Now, the question is not whether developing countries can afford the peaceful uses of outer space. **Rather, it is whether they can afford to ignore them.** Furthermore, effective coordination through regional cooperation could help realize the potential of such remarkable technologies.

Bank's Involvement in Distance Education

10. The Asian Development Bank's initiative in the distance education area stems from a professional staff paper published by the Education Division (IFED) of the Bank in 1985. This paper laid the ground work for a major Regional Seminar on Distance Education which was organized by the Bank, in Bangkok in 1986. The Bangkok Seminar gathered together a group of internationally renowned distance education experts and the papers presented for the Seminar (now published in two volumes) are recognized as a seminar resource in the field. One of the recommendations of the Bangkok Seminar was to give serious consideration to the establishment of a mechanism for enough regional cooperation in Distance Education. As a follow-up on this recommendation, the Bank sponsored a Round Table Conference on Distance Education for some countries in 1989, which was

held in Pakistan. The function, form, operational and financial viability of such a mechanism provided the central agenda of the Round Table Conference. The papers prepared for the Round Table Conference were published by the Bank in book form. In addition to the proposed Bangladesh Open University project, the Bank is preparing projects in the sectors of Pakistan and Sri Lanka and is considering increased involvement in other countries.

Progress of Education in Bangladesh

11. Bangladesh is one of the educationally backward nations. Out of the total population of 115 million, the number of children of 6-10 years age group is 14.87 million. All of them should be in primary schools, but only 11.56 million are in schools and the remaining 3.31 million add to the mass of illiterates numbering about 75 million. Not only this, 65% of in-school children, i.e. 7.5 million will also drop out before reaching class 5. There are 19.63 million children in the age group 11-17, out of whom only 3.04 million are enrolled in secondary schools. The remaining 16.63 million children are illiterates or dropouts from primary grades. There are 9.90 million adolescents in the age group 18-21 out of whom only 0.70 million are enrolled in colleges, universities and other institutes of higher learning. The remaining 9.20 million consist of illiterates and dropouts from primary and secondary grades. There are many difficulties in recruiting and training sufficient number of qualified teachers to improve primary and secondary education. In 1989, the number of untrained primary and secondary teachers was 41,898 and 89,480, respectively.

12. Higher education in Bangladesh is the privilege of the few. There are 458 colleges with a total enrolment of 650,300. In addition, there are 7 Universities (48,800), 18 Polytechnics (4,000), four BITs (2,400), one BUET (500), three Agriculture Colleges and one Agriculture University (7,400), nine Medical Colleges (7,400), one Dental College (60), one IPGMR (200), and one College of Nursing (120).

13. There is fierce competition among students to gain admission in these institutes. For example, 28,250 students applied for admission in the University of Dhaka in 1990-91 against 3,635 seats. As a result, only 12.87 per cent applicants were admitted. In the entrance test for admission in BUET, 2,598 students appeared and only 508 qualified. On one hand, the majority of students are unable to get admissions and on the other hand, the output of existing institutions is so low that the human resource needs cannot be met. For example, in 1985 the stock of graduate physicians and dental surgeons was 16,000 and 500. It was expected to be raised to 22,500 and 7,500 respectively by 1990, but the gap has not been filled up. At present, the number of graduate doctors is 18,925 and the number of dentists is 530, i.e. the increase in six years has been only 2,925 and 30, respectively, which is depressingly low in the context of the population.

14. No precise data about the human resource demands of the country, vis-a-vis the training capacity of the institutes in different sectors, is available. But the information collected by the team of consultants for the BOU project has revealed that there are 7,000 trained and employed nurses who desire to undergo a degree course in Nursing, but the only

College of Nursing in the country admits only 120 per annum; the actual stock of Health Assistants in 1984-1985 was 15,000 and it was to be raised to 23,000 in 1989-1990. During 1988-1990, 5,000 Health Assistants were trained, leaving a backlog of 18,000. In addition to this backlog, 5,000 more Health Assistants will be recruited in 1991 for whom a training program is being designed, but the existing backlog of 18,000 will continue. There was no stock of Family Planning Assistants and Family Welfare Assistants in 1984-1985 but the target for 1989-1990 was 4,500 and 35,000, respectively. Discussions in the Directorate of Agricultural Extension have revealed that there are 13,000 employees under the Directorate who have completed the two-year inservice course in Agriculture Extension and are now working as Block Supervisors, Junior Extension Officers and Assistant Agriculture Officers. A one-year course for upgrading their knowledge and skills has been designed by the Directorate, but it is unable to train the above-mentioned extension staff through the existing extension institutes because of inadequate facilities and financial constraints.

15. Similarly, during the consultants' discussion with the Executive Director, Mass Education Program, it was found that until June 1991, a total of 519,090 learners in 11-45 years age group benefitted through 12,534 literacy courses of about one-year duration each. These courses were organized in only 177 Upazilas. This program has to be extended to other Upazilas and will require training of additional mass education teachers, trainers, organizers and supervisors.

16. Thus, it is clear from the foregoing description that the

existing facilities in the educational system are inadequate to meet the educational and training needs of the country. On the other hand, it is not possible to expand the conventional system because of financial constraints. Bangladesh must therefore look for an alternative system of education. It must take education out of the stranglehold of ivory towers, away from the elitist approach and open the gates of education at all levels to the masses. The education system has to be democratized because educated people can be an asset in the building up of an economically sound nation.

17. The education of people in the villages, and above all, the women and rural youth, needs to be given priority in all future educational plans. The need today is to provide various kinds of functional education to these people so as to help them increase their earnings and come out of the wretched environs of poverty. Education at all levels must be made relevant to the needs of society and the nation. The conventional system has failed in this respect because of its limitations. Therefore, what is needed is a highly innovative system of education which should widen access to education at all levels and provide meaningful education. Of course, some general basic education is needed to instill values of life in the minds of the people, particularly the upcoming generation. But how can it be done when thousands of the teachers working in the schools continue to remain untrained. This indicates another direction for the new system of Education for the Masses, i.e. training of the trainers. We must remember that with the rapid growth of knowledge, education has to be regarded as a continuing, life-long process. People engaged in all vocations and professions will need periodical updating education in order

to keep themselves abreast of the new knowledge and developments in their fields.

18. Fortunately, we now have highly developed communication technologies which transcend time and distance, and can thus help provide education to the masses where they live and grow. Printed course materials supplemented by radio, TV, audio and video cassettes and other inventions in this area can help in providing an effective education system.

19. Let us therefore step out of the beaten track and adopt an alternative educational system which can help in achieving the goal of education for the masses. The existing conditions in Bangladesh strongly favor the idea of an Open University, which can usher in a new era by taking education to the doorsteps of the people. The conventional system, too, can continue to perform an important role by reshaping their curricula and by making education relevant to the needs of the society. Teachers working in the conventional system will be considerably involved in the preparation of open university course materials and providing counselling assignments. Thus, there will be a mutual give-and-take, a pooling and sharing of knowledge and ideas, experiences and resources, etc. The conventional system, too, would benefit from this by trying to convert the age-old classroom system into an inter-disciplinary and multi-media teaching system. This could best be achieved by allowing students' mobility between the two systems. The conventional system cannot present wide course offerings to their students because of various limitations, whereas the open university can. However, if the students' mobility is

allowed, it should be possible for the conventional system to include some courses of the open university, if they find such courses to be more relevant to their needs.

20. The open university through distance education could provide a wide variety of courses at levels ranging from literacy programs to higher degrees, and assisting the poor and those residing in far-flung, rural areas to develop functional literacy, livelihood skills, self-reliant enterprises, and information useful to their own personal growth. Open learning system is the means for millions of teachers, new and in-service, to upgrade themselves; for government employees to achieve higher educational levels; and for millions of farmers, extension workers and rural families to get up-to-date market information, more employment skills and production know-how. Without detracting from the achievements and usefulness of the schooling system, the overriding concern is how to promote self-reliance as a strategy for education, thus liberating the learner to achieve the ultimate goal of education for all (which I doubt could be achieved without full use of communication technologies) especially with self-learning capabilities, as learners will become their own best teachers and will not be dependent upon the provision of a school and a teacher to acquire knowledge. All these characteristics and functional advantages of Distance Education have to be harnessed for the education of the masses, and to achieve the goals in the shortest possible time with DE's proven efficiency and effectiveness. Ignorance is the singular great enemy; liberation of the learner is the ultimate mission; and self-reliance the strategy for education.

21. Finally, the most potent weapon for self-reliance is the education of people in general -- education modelled on visions, aspirations, capabilities of the people concerned, in the context of their socio-political-economic environments, traditions and cultures. Ignorance should be tackled with serious plans for action, and not with empty rhetoric. The immediate challenge facing the government leaders is to device practical strategies, encourage communities to take the lead and to implement activities for growth. Furthermore, these strategies need to have appropriate resource support; men, money, media and management.